

# How the President made up his mind

STATINTL

by HUGH SIDNEY

In the Oval Office the symbolism of heroic defiance is overwhelming. The American eagle is there 15 times. From standards behind the President's desk hang more than 200 streamers commemorating triumphant U.S. military campaigns dating back to the birth of the Republic. George Washington in his general's stars looks down from over the mantel.

President Nixon seemed in the grip of the legend last week as he approached his final conviction that there was no other answer to the invasion of South Vietnam than to seal the harbors of the North with mines and go all-out with bombing. Even as behind-the-scenes activity increased, the White House grew strangely silent. It was a silence of concern, deeper concern than this administration has yet faced.

Nixon sat one day and mused, almost as much to himself as to the small band of his aides around him: "I know the risks involved." His manner was fatalistic, his tone one of total resignation. He was about to place everything he held important on the line—his careful moves toward a generation of peace, his own political future.

Delivering his decision to the congressional leaders just before his television address, he said it again in a different way: "I've crossed the Rubicon. The die is cast." The reason came a few minutes later, after he had explained what he planned to tell the nation. "They spit in our eye in Paris. What else can we do?" When he ended that session he said quietly to the assembled leaders, "If you can support me, I'll appreciate it. If you can't, I'll understand."

Not all could. After Nixon had left the session and Admiral Moorer, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, was explaining with his maps how the harbors would be mined and the land targets bombed, Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield spoke up. "This is a major expansion of the war. It will have grave effects on this world far beyond this time." Sen. William Fulbright declared, "If it wasn't Nixon's war before, it certainly is now."

"Have you thought of a Dunkirk-type operation?" asked Washington's Sen. Warren Magnuson, one of those old hawks who has turned dove. The President had cited the danger to the 60,000 Americans still in Vietnam as the main reason for this new involvement. Secretary of De-